## *The Versatility of Lunch*

MEALS, the sociologists inform us, are a measure of civilization, and in the eating customs of a people its life and spirit stand revealed. Certainly the evolution of lunch in America is worth the attention of those pulse-feeling analysts who write bi-weekly articles on the national soul. There is material for still another book on Americanism in the change that has come over our midday meal in a generation or two.

There was a time, our grandfathers inform us, when at noon everyone knocked off for an hour to stow away a hearty dinner and when a cheerful and indigestible array of good things marked the zenith of the day's activities. How after the unstinting dinners our grandmothers used to make their husbands managed to accomplish anything in the afternoon is hard to conceive. Our forebears must indeed have acquired the Tired Business Man feeling about two in the afternoon, at which time they probably gave up in despair and went to see a matinee of the Follies. And doubtless at night they came home and spoke of the decline of the American drama.

But the midday dinner long before our own time disappeared. Even a seven course splurge is advertised as a luncheon, and only bricklayers and night city editors would think of eating dinner by sunlight. However much or little you eat, if this human indulgence takes place before nightfall it is lunch.

But while the old name wandered down the face of the dial until six p. m. or later, and the dinner of old shortened into lunch, the actual content of the meal became no slimmer. When you announced at the office that you were "going to lunch" those who stayed behind had accurate mouth watering notions of what they were missing. You paid a little more or a little less than your neighbor, but the method was the same. You both sat at a table and were both served by an old-fashioned third party known as a waiter or waitress. You may have got lobster salad while your neighbor plodded along on veal, but atmospherically you were equals.

Even in those dim, dead days, however, lunch began to lose its stable and respectable character. It seemed with the loss of its more dignified name to have lost its dignity as an institution. The high stool lunch counter was the first hint of the change, and since then the mutations have changed this daily phenomenon so that its name means nothing.

Lunch, rather, has come to mean many things. "I am going out to lunch," may still mean that you are going down to have a table d'hote dinner straight through with music and without a change from the soup to the dessert. But more probably it means that you are going to a place where you walk around, picking your meal off the walls and announcing your pluckings to a most polite and gullible attendant as you walk out. Lunch, according to this custom, is, although usually less than a meal, morally much more. It is a noonday lesson in practical ethics. It is a spur to morality and memory as well as to digestion, and a clean cut report on the number of doughnuts consumed is as good for the soul as their consumption was dangerous to the digestion.

Or, probably enough, your trip to lunch is a journey to a combined laboratory and telephone exchange where you drop coins into random slots and sportively take chances on the results. Without your favorite waiter to tell you the fried corned beef is very good today, you have to take the label at its face value or use your judgment and experience as a guide. For once the nickel is gone the way of all slot machines there is no recovery—and there is a line behind you waiting to try the same experiment in dietetics.

Or it may be that you walk ten blocks to a side street emporium which you admire because it has faithfully dedicated itself forever to the perfect serving of beans. Not that you like beans, but there is in the scheme a pathetic devotion to a hopeless cause that seems to deserve your support for one lunch hour a day.

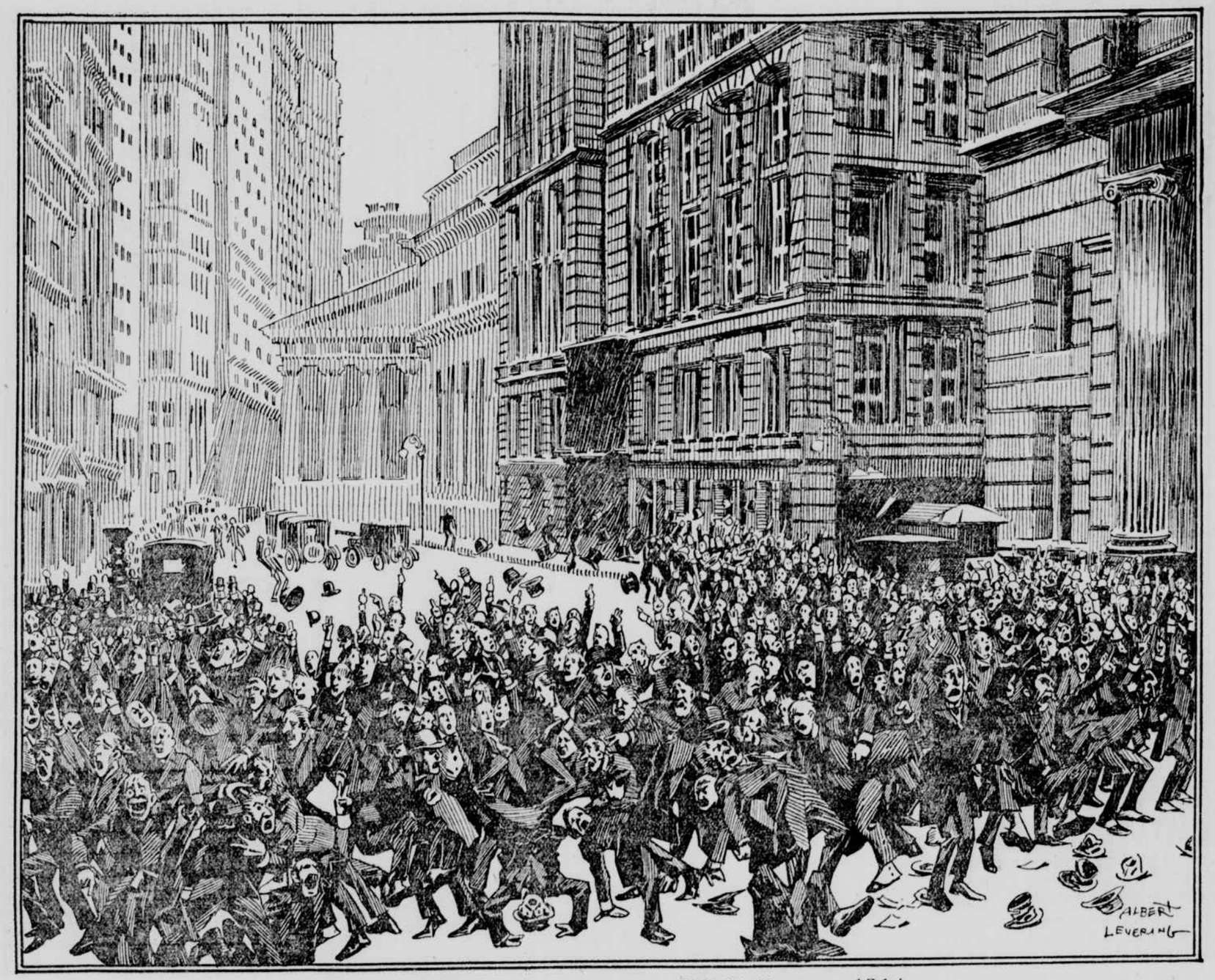
Lunch may indeed merely be the arrogant and reminiscent name you give to a three-minute vigil at a soda fountain, where you are desperately determined to get your nutrition in marble halls, even if it be only those of a syndicate drug store. And after getting what might otherwise have been a jelly omelette in a twenty cent glass of malted milk you spend the fifty-seven minutes you saved reading the cartoons in the early editions of the evening papers or watching the demonstration of a new weight reducer in the drug store window.

Lunch finally promises to become merely a name for one swift swallow, since the introduction of the lunch tablets which guarantee to nourish you as well as the seven course meal spoken of above. Indeed, if you take three of these lunch may be entirely eliminated for the rest of the week, and if it becomes a habit the evening dinner, a younger and more rickety institution, may also disappear.

But for the present lunch is merely a graceful evasion for your way of spending one hour a day. It will probably always remain, although eating ceases to be its main characteristic. It will persist for a synoyme for a brief daily mystery, a piquant interruption in the day's routine. It will endure as the sacred interlude which you need never account for, whether you pass it in the basement of a second hand bookstore or in the dissipation of a midday banquet. The adventure of lunch will remain a signal of the versatility of the soul of America.

# WALL STREET, "THE NATIONAL BAROMETER"

*Drawn by Albert Levering.*




Effect of War Rumors on Wall Street, 1914




Effect of Peace Rumors on Wall Street, 1916

### Sweepings from Inkpot Alley

*Continued from Page Two*

his story, "The Trufflers," was running in "The Cosmopolitan," they expressed great amusement over the fact that the author lived in Concord, Mass., and the illustrator, George Gibbs, lived in Philadelphia. What, they asked, could such bucolic persons know of the complex soul of the Village? They pointed out that before he wrote the book Mr. Merwin had been seen lurking in the shadow of the Washington Arch for a few days, presumably in search of local color, but Mr. Gibbs had not been around at all.

Mr. Merwin, of course, is not a genuine New Englander. A New York immigrant from the Middle West, he lived for several years in Greenwich Village. He moved to Concord early last fall because he thought it a quiet place to write and a convenient place, in normal years, to get to the world's series.

"Samuel Merwin is a Victorian moralist!" a horrified Greenwich Villager remarked to me one evening. After I left him I recalled reading a criticism written by a simple but superior person who professed to find Mr. Merwin rather naughty. The next morning, as it happened, I received a letter from Mr. Merwin in which he stated emphatically that the craft of the novelist should be absolutely aloof and detached from all considerations of morality or immorality as such. In this incident lurks a moral for critics.

But, after all, the tale's the thing. If Mr. Merwin's new story—I haven't seen it yet—can hold the readers as effectively as its title should catch them, he needn't worry about the skeptics in Washington Square.

## *The Way of a Man With a Dime*

SUPPOSE you had come by that Canadian dime in merely the ordinary course of daily affairs—oh, quite honestly, and without even the faintest idea of who it was that had given it to you. Would you calmly throw it away, despite the fact that it represented the tenth part of a dollar in coin of the realm? Is your conscience so acute that you couldn't save the coin in a separate pocket until you might slip it into the ravenous maw of a dime-sucker some dark night on the roof of a Fifth Avenue 'bus? Are you so determined a censor of your own actions that you couldn't even permit yourself to use it to ring the bell twice one day when you might call your almost-suburban friend from a deposit-ten-cents-please telephone?

Well, regardless of what may be your particular delicacies in such matters, it was George who had the impassable dime and the almost impossible problem. So George thought the case over with great care.

If it were counterfeit, said he to himself, there'd be only one thing to do. One would simply have to unpocket the coin and pocket the loss. But this shining disk that lay in his hand, with the portrait of that royal namesake of his and all the rest, was a perfectly good dime. It was merely in the wrong place. He might mail it to some one in Canada, to spend in the natural way, but whom did he know in Canada? Not a soul, of course. However, he wouldn't even have to go all the way to Canada. Buffalo or Detroit or St. Paul would do, for lots of Dominion money was used in all of those places.

Yes, thought George, he'd mail the dime up to his cousin in Buffalo, and ask him to send back a real honest-to-goodness United States 10-cent piece. But the postage? Two cents each way left six to cover the paper and envelopes, and the time and the trouble and the risk of losing it all in the post! At that rate he'd be owing himself money! It would be cheaper to chuck it away.

But it was a nice, shining and properly coined 1915 dime, whose milled edge hadn't even worn smooth, so he dropped it in his pocket and forgot it.

That evening when he left the office George bought his usual paper from the usual boy just outside the building, and was absorbing parts of the biggest headlines as he dodged over toward the subway station. Suddenly he felt a strong tugging at his coat, and a murky palm with a dazzling disk resting in it was shot almost into his face. "Looka' w'at y' gimme!" yelled the boy, angrily, and George looked at his Canadian dime!

Well, thought George, after he'd traded two dull nickels for the little piece of stamped silver, the boy was right. If he'd noticed it he certainly wouldn't have taken his paper and nine pennies for that foreign dime. The boy would be likely to lose any customer he gave it to . . . still, there wasn't any reason for the youngster to make such a fuss about it. The dime was good, and not a counterfeit.

Not a counterfeit, eh? How did he know? There must be bad Canadian dimes, just as there were bad copies of our own money. Perhaps he had palmed off a worthless coin on that newsboy, and the fellow knew it and thought he'd made it himself! A rather guilty blush started across his forehead as he saw the boy's imagination picturing him with a crucible and hand-mould somewhere, turning those things out by the quart to pass on innocent newspaper venders. Just then his eyes rested on a pair of square-toed boots, with blue legs rising out of them; he gave such a nervous jump as he looked up and met the policeman's gaze that the puzzled officer turned and followed him all the way to the subway entrance before concluding that nothing much was the matter.

But it felt like a good dime, said George to himself. He remembered that some one had told him that counterfeits always felt greasy, and this one certainly was not slippery. At least, it did not seem very slippery—probably it was his hands that made it slide a little, for they felt moister than usual. How could folks tell what was bad money, anyway? He had seen Italians bite coins he'd given them, so as he went down the steps he chewed a little on the edge of this one. It didn't seem to taste different from any money he'd tried before, but of course it had been years . . .

Glancing up, he saw a Broadway express pulling in. He rushed to the ticket window, looking sidelong to see if he could possibly get through before that nearest end door was banged shut. He took his nickel change, and was just about to pick up the subway ticket when he was surprised to see the agent excitedly grab back the green bit of pasteboard and shoot out his glittering dime and the words: "That's no good to me, you know!" There was that Canadian money trifle again! He picked it up and put it in a trousers pocket, and hurriedly laid a local dime on the glass ledge. This the man accepted eagerly, giving in return a smile, a ticket and a nickel.

When George had run past the chopper and caught his train, he reached for the troublesome coin, and found in the pocket with it a nickel. Quite abruptly, he realized that he'd been given two five-cent pieces and a ticket, all for one dime!

The question now was not only what to do with the Canadian ten cents, but also how to dispose of the extra nickel. Should he send it back to the subway people? Should he donate it to some worthy charity? Or would it be best, in the long run, to try the same thing at every ticket window he found, until he either lost his dime or became fabulously wealthy on his dishonestly gained nickels?